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A rally for the Islamic government of the Sudan, installed after a 1989 coup. Though initially welcomed by many Sudanese, the Islamists have

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The New York Times Magazine / MAY 31, 1992

Militant Islam is once again on the move, shaking the foundations of culture and government in even the most stable Arab states.

BY JUDITH MILLER

LAHIDA KANDIL, AN ALGERIAN BUSINESSWOMAN, began to have fears the day her young cousin returned home from school and announced that he could no longer kiss her good night. His teachers had told him that kissing women was *haram*, forbidden by God.

In the Sudan, a university student lay on a cot in a dingy hospital in Khartoum. His head was bandaged. His hands and back were discolored by burns, some still oozing. In February, during a demonstration by an Islamic youth group, he was hit with a bottle of flammable liquid, setting him afire. No one has been arrested for the attack.

In Egypt, one of the oldest and strongest nation-states in the Middle East, Ramadan, the Muslim holy month of dawn-to-dusk fasting, was less joyous at night than usual this spring, after musicals with dancing were banned. Meanwhile, in an ominous echo of the Salman Rushdie case, a civil servant, Alan Hamed, was sentenced to eight years in prison and hounded by death threats for writing a novel that the state's highest Islamic authority called "blasphemous." Officials say he will probably go to jail; the ruling is too sensitive to be reversed.

More than a decade after the first modern Islamic revolution, in Iran, militant Islam is once again on the move, transforming everyday life in the Middle East and challenging the legitimacy of almost every state.

For now, impoverished Sudan is the only Middle

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Eastern country in which a militant Islamic government has come to power since the 1979 revolution in Teheran. But most Arab governments are struggling to contain Islamic pressures and to respond to a widespread desire among their citizens for a more "Islamic" government and society. Even in countries where there is little prospect that Islamic forces will rule in the near future, Islam has become the vocabulary of life, changing the language of politics, aspects of national culture and ethnic traditions.

"To a certain extent, Islamic forces have already won," says Gilles Kepel, a French expert on Islamic extremism. "What we're seeing is the re-Islamization of the entire region, the alteration of basic patterns of life. Europe is not immune. In my neighborhood in Paris, I used to see one veiled woman a week. Now I see five a day."

While the revolution that ousted the Western-allied Shah of Iran was what Kepel calls "Islam from above," the changes under way in the rest of the Middle East are the result of "Islam from the base," pressure from entrenched grass-roots movements with mass appeal, which cannot easily be disregarded by current rulers.

In scores of interviews in the Middle East, as well as in London and Paris, Arab and Western scholars, politicians, students, ordinary working people, clerics and commentators all agreed on a central fact: the ideologies of secular pan-Arabism and Arab nationalism, which have dominated the anti-colonial struggle for independence and statehood for 50 years, have been eclipsed. While the nationalistic struggles continue, the anti-Western slogans and appeals to

pride are now couched in the new form and language of resurgent Islam.

Some argue that militant Islam is the opposite of Arab nationalism, which sought independence and development through the construction of modern secular nation-states, which in turn played down religious and ethnic differences. But Albert Hourani, the British historian, argues that Islamic political movements are the third phase of Arab nationalism. The first stage, between 1900 and 1940, focused on what he calls bourgeois nationalism — the quest for independence and social goals like the emancipation of women. The second phase, from the 1940's to

the 1970's, concentrated on social justice — redistributing wealth, nationalizing industries and the like. "Islam is the third wave," he says.

There is widespread agreement that political Islam has gained considerable strength from the two cataclysmic events to hit the Middle East in recent years — the end of the cold war and the Persian Gulf war. The collapse of the Soviet Union and Communism were devastating to leftist secular forces — militant Islam's staunchest internal opponents — not only depriving them of



Above: An antifundamentalist rally in Algiers last January. Women stood to lose the most if the Islamists had come to power.

Right: Islamic women studying at Bab Ezzouar University, near Algiers. Some fundamentalists claim that Islam is not as intolerant as its critics say.

Left: Prisoners in prayer at a camp near Ouargla, Algeria. Islamic fundamentalists won control of the country after elections last December, but a military-led coup prevented them from taking power. As many as 6,500 Islamists are now being detained by the new rulers.

Below: Eight-year-old Abdul Fatah, an Islamic preacher known as the Child Imam, assailed "adultery" and "debauchery" before a crowd of 200,000 Algerians at the time of elections last December.



military and economic aid but also undermining their political credibility. The gulf war further demonstrated the impotence not only of the vanquished Arab states but also of the victors, who relied utterly on Western military might.

"Because of the failure of the existing regimes, their corruption, bankruptcy, the absence of an alternative, inspiring vision, there is a huge political vacuum," says Mohamed Helkal, Egypt's most prominent exponent of secular Arab nationalism. "Only Islam makes sense, is authentic, to most Arabs."

More than anything else, observes Fouad Ajami, a political scientist at Johns Hopkins University, political Islam "is a commentary on the alternatives."

The West tends to regard the growing political popularity of Islam as dangerous, monolithic and novel. Yet, whatever dangers it may present, and whether the West can "live" with politicized Islam or not — both matters of much debate — there is nothing new about the phenomenon. "Almost every Arab dynasty started as a religious movement whose aim was to revive and renew the society," points out Saad Eddin Ibrahim, founder of the Ibn Khaldoun Center in Cairo.

And it is certainly not monolithic. Political Islam is as diverse as the Arabs themselves, as different as the

countries in which it has taken hold. In almost all cases, though, its resurgence is fueled not only by the failure of existing governments but also by the widespread belief that existing political structures are alien to Arab culture.

And yet, the appeal of fundamentalist Islam cannot be explained solely by social and economic grievances against existing Arab Governments. These are societies whose oldest members can recall both the wave of Westernizing that began early in the century and the virtually feudal societies that it nearly swept away. There is a powerful nostalgia for the Islamic civilization that reached its apex in the 9th and 10th centuries — a mobilizing, conquering faith, mixing social virtue with scientific and technological prowess. The other side of that coin is a rage against the West, which supported the Shah in Iran and other brutal and corrupt dictators throughout the region, provided they were pro-Western.

Most critically, Arabs long for the restoration of pride and dignity — the same yearning that led so many Arabs, even those who hated the Iraqi regime, to support Saddam Hussein in the gulf war. The despair over the state of Arab society and the yearning for lost greatness are apparent in the slogan that has become the hallmark of the movement: "Islam is the solution."

On the defensive almost everywhere, Arab rulers have adopted varying strategies for containing what some officials dismiss as a passing fad. Tunisia has chosen repression. Algeria toyed with democracy but fell back on repression when it seemed clear that the fundamentalists were going to win. Saudi Arabia, despite its cultural fundamentalism, still feels compelled to appease





Above: An Egyptian family watches the superstar of TV shakhs, Metwally Shamsi, who on his daily program has frequently called against officials and un-Islamic ways.

Left: A Koran reading at a private mosque in Cairo. Militant Islam in Egypt has been contained through a mix of repression, co-optation and political participation.



THE STENCH OF FAILURE

— uncollected garbage — hung over the Algerian capital in February. Piles of trash littered this majestic city spread on the hills overlooking the Mediterranean.

Algiers in the chilly thrall of early spring is subdued: tanks guard the entrances to many bridges and tunnels. Machine-gun-toting soldiers and the riot police, their faces hidden by visored helmets, patrol the city's broad boulevards and the narrow, labyrinthine alleys of the celebrated Casbah. A curfew insures that the normally bustling streets are deadly quiet at night.

the elite with a slight increase in political participation and poorer Saudis with larger subsidies for gasoline, electricity, health care and so on. Jordan has attempted to draw the militants into the Government, so that they can share the blame for the country's troubles. Egypt is ruthlessly repressing groups that espouse violence, tolerating those that don't and stealing Islamic militants' themes and slogans. "We're becoming more Muslim than the Prophet," says Mohammed Noah, a popular Egyptian singer and playwright.

It's a world apart from the scene just a few years ago. Back then, in October 1988, in the aftermath of bloody food riots in which the army killed at least 250 young Algerians, President Chadli Benjedid had decided on a gradual shift to democracy, and the atmosphere was expectant, even hopeful.

But there was nothing gradual about the change. Within a year, Algeria, long a feuding, factionalized country, was exploding with democracy. By 1991, there were 58 political parties, about 30 independent newspapers and a flourishing debate about the future of the country's 28 million people.

Ignoring a constitutional ban on religious parties, the Government in 1989 formally recognized the Islamic Salvation Front, known by the French abbreviation F.I.S., whose vague goal was to establish an Islamic state. The Government also looked the other way when the party illegally used most of the country's 10,000 mosques for political organizing and proselytizing. In June 1990, the F.I.S. carried 55 percent of the municipal and gubernatorial votes and gained control of some 800 local government offices.

The results were a warning that Algerians intended to dump the ruling National Liberation Front and its heavy-handed, secular socialist Government at the first opportunity. Indeed, the party's record was appalling, given Algeria's oil and gas resources. Once self-sufficient, Algeria was by 1990 importing about 75 percent of its food. The national debt had topped \$25 billion, while inflation stood at more than 40 percent. The unemployment rate, officially 30 percent, was much higher.

The voters' first opportunity came in parliamentary elections last December, when the F.I.S. unseated the National Liberation Front. At that point, however, the army decided to end the short-lived experiment in democracy. Algeria would not become the first Arab country in which an Islamic government came to power through the ballot box.

Tunisia, Jordan, Libya and Egypt — besieged by militant Islamic groups — (Continued on page 38)

ISLAM

(Continued from page 26)

all were relieved. So was much of the country's mostly Western-oriented, secular middle class, particularly women. But the action shocked and embittered many in the West, and many Arabs as well. "There are no democrats in Algeria," says a former senior official. "Not in the Government — Chadli simply used democracy as a strategy for surviving and certainly not in the F.I.S. For them, it was a vehicle to come to power."

Supporters of the coup argue that the F.I.S. never got a majority of Algeria's vote, or anything like it. Only 59 percent of the people voted, they say, and of those, only 48 percent voted for the F.I.S. Moreover, the Islamic party received a million fewer votes in 1992 than in the 1990 municipal elections.

"Less than 30 percent of the country voted for transforming Algeria into an Islamic state and all that implies — chopping off thieves' hands, stoning adulterers and other parts of sharia, the Islamic law," says Ali Haroun, one of the five-member High State Council, which now rules. Before the coup, Haroun was Algeria's human rights minister, the first in the Arab world.

The Government's defenders cite the example of Nazism. "If in 1933 in Weimar

Germany, you could have found a nondemocratic way to stop Hitler after an election in which he, too, won roughly the same proportion of votes, shouldn't you have done so?" asks Rachid Mismouni, a prominent Algerian novelist.

Quardia Ider, an assistant professor of urban studies in Algiers, says critics of the coup are naïve. "These were not democrats interested in dialogue," she says of the F.I.S. "They were little fascists just waiting for their moment. Believe me, had the army not acted, there would have been civil war. Middle-aged people like me who fought for our independence would never have accepted having our freedom denied by bearded, sexually frustrated men. I would have picked up a machine gun."

"It's a paradox, isn't it?" she says, pausing. "The military is protecting civil society itself."

But the rights of the F.I.S., which was banned in March, were not so zealously guarded. An estimated 6,500 suspected F.I.S. members and sympathizers are still being detained.

The Government spread lies to frighten people, claims a young F.I.S. member, Mohammed, who adds that Islam is by no means intolerant, and would not have been imposed by force. Women would still be able to work, but at home, "protected." And they would be paid

for caring for their children, he says, adding: "Wouldn't you give the job to the man who must support a family rather than to a woman?"

"Jews and Zionists have tried to give our religion a bad name," he goes on, stroking what was once his beard, shaved to avoid attracting police scrutiny. "Secretly, the West fears us, because it suspects that Islam is fairer than your system."

With the F.I.S. forced underground, he says: "We have no choice now but to fight. But when we come to power — and we will — we'll remember who stood with us and who was against us."

"There's one basic fact they cannot change," Mohammed says softly. "We chose democracy; the government did not."

What would an F.I.S.-dominated government have done? Women, undoubtedly, would have lost many freedoms. There were reports before the coup that F.I.S. officials harassed women who dressed inappropriately. In many F.I.S. districts, however, services were delivered effectively for the first time in memory. The F.I.S. introduced literacy classes in the mosques, delivered food and services to the poor and provided an unresponsive welfare bureaucracy.

But there is ample evidence that F.I.S., like many other Islamic groups, led a double linguistic life. There were words to inspire or in-

cite the faithful, and others for calming people down. There were answers for Western journalists — full of references to democracy and human rights — and fire-and-brimstone tirades for the faithful, pledging revenge against Zionists and Western imperialists, as well as their regional lackeys.

Before the first round of parliamentary voting in December, F.I.S. leaders stressed their democratic intentions. But the tone and message changed abruptly after it scored so well. Only then did supposedly moderate leaders begin emphasizing the party's earlier slogan — "No law. No constitution. Only the laws of God and the Koran."

"You must understand that the F.I.S. had nothing to do with Islam," said Sheikh Ahmed Merani, an F.I.S. dissident. Rather, he says, it was a vehicle to obtain power. Merani was expelled from the F.I.S. ruling circle for publicly denouncing Abassi Madani, political chief of the F.I.S., as "a danger to Algeria and Islam."

Whether the F.I.S. truly threatened democracy is a question that will be debated for some time. Many would argue that the strife-torn F.I.S. would have been too weak to form an effective government, and that the army would have prevented a total seizure of power.

Others feared that President Chadli was too weak to safeguard democracy. Indeed, a report that Chadli was prepared to acquiesce to an F.I.S. demand for the ministries of defense and interior helped spark the coup.

In any event, those in power decided the risk was too great. "It's fine for others to talk about conducting a grand political experiment in Algeria," said Maloud Brahimi, former head of Algeria's League of Human Rights. "But what do we look like — white rats?"

There were other considerations, a Western diplomat notes. Algeria has a nuclear program, which it vows is for peaceful purposes. "Imagine not just the restoration of the Islamic caliph, a leader who combines temporal and spiritual power," the diplomat says, "but a nuclearized caliph."

Even many who supported the coup, however, say that simple repression of the F.I.S. will ultimately fail unless the Government offers a genuine

alternative to the Islamists. The prospects of that are not bright, particularly with the country facing the added security costs of suppressing guerrilla fighting and terrorist actions. "Algeria can recover only if Algerians are willing to tighten their belts and sacrifice," says a foreign economist. "They might have been willing to do so for the F.I.S., but what do they owe this new Government?"

Most Algerians agree that the coup has soured the atmosphere, leaving a pervasive sense of unease, or even despair. Since February, the Government's crackdown has intensified. Now, even the coup's supporters are pessimistic. "But we had no good options," says a senior Government official. "We had a choice between the plague and cholera."

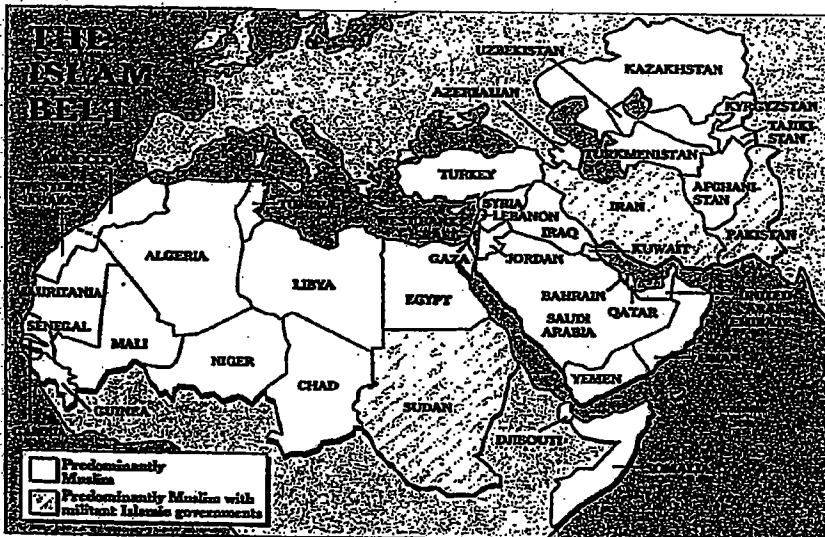
THE SUDAN IS what ruling Algerians were afraid their country might become — a police state, with God.

With 28 million people spread across an area one-fourth the size of the continental United States, the Sudan is a troubled country, with a per capita income of less than \$100 a year, the Arab world's lowest, coupled with a soaring birth rate. And it was struggling long before Lieut. Gen. Omar Hassan al-Bashir staged a military coup in 1989 against the democratically elected but monumentally ineffective Government of Sadiq al-Mahdi.

After seven years of democratic chaos and civil war, many Sudanese greeted the takeover with relief. Some even hoped that the military would be able to end the protracted civil war between the ruling Muslims, Arab-dominated north and the largely African-and-Christian south.

But by 1990, Hassan al-Turabi, chief of the National Islamic Front, had emerged as the regime's mastermind, General Bashir's behind-the-scenes mentor and, some say, effective boss. Turabi, a veteran politician who had served in numerous governments, was now finally in a position to accomplish his lifelong goal: to turn the Sudan into an Islamic state that would inspire militant Islamic groups throughout the world.

But Islamic Sudan is hardly an inspiration. Since Bashir came to power, critics



The Sudan is the only Middle Eastern country where a militant Islamic government has come to power since the 1979 revolution in Iran. But the Gulf war and the collapse of Communism have led to a surge of Islam throughout the Middle East.

say, traditional political parties and trade unions have been suppressed, the country's constitution suspended, all private publications banned and the civil service, judiciary and army purged of nonbelievers. At least three coup attempts have been quashed, 28 officers executed and no fewer than 1,300 officers cashiered. Detention centers known as ghost houses have sprung up throughout the country.

Once uncommon, torture by official and unofficial security forces is widespread, according to Amnesty International and other human rights groups. At the heart of the repression is not the army but the National Islamic Front, which has infiltrated key civil groups and institutions, and created new mechanisms of control.

The party created "Popular Defense Forces," paramilitary police groups composed of students and civil servants, who are given two months of rudimentary military training and religious indoctrination. And most neighborhoods now boast "popular committees," cells headed by the front's members or sympathizers, among whose duties are to report un-Islamic behavior.

Women, as usual, are prime targets. In November, General Bashir banned dancing between the sexes and decreed that all female students and women who enter Gov-

ernment offices in the north must dress according to traditional Islamic standards. A Sudanese doctor reports having treated several young women who were lashed for inappropriate dress even before the code was announced. "Since this is not part of most Sudanese women's traditional dress, women have to acquire a new wardrobe," the doctor says. "But many simply can't afford it. So many are scared to death to leave their homes."

In March, the Government announced a new criminal code based on Islamic law, or sharia, which includes corporal punishments, like amputation for repeated theft, stoning for adultery, lashings for other offenses and even crucifixion. While numerous sentences have been handed down, however, not one has been implemented.

Turabi's militant Islam is distinctly home-grown, and the National Islamic Front is among the oldest modern Islamic parties in the Middle East. Turabi said he began pressing for an Islamic state soon after securing his doctorate in law at the Sorbonne in 1964.

It was Turabi who in 1983 persuaded Gen. Gaafar al-Nimeiry, the pro-American dictator who was overthrown in 1985, to begin to adopt sharia. It was he who helped write the laws, including the Sudan's first death penalty for apostasy, still a crime under

the new regime. And it was Turabi who persuaded General Nimeiry to permit the Faisal Islamic Bank, the Middle East's first Islamic bank, to operate in the Sudan. Operating from a penthouse in the bank's headquarters, Turabi's party became the best-financed in the Sudan. Wealthy, disciplined, well organized and convinced of the righteousness of its cause, the party spread throughout the country.

But ruling has not been easy. University students — the traditional vanguard of the Sudan's elite, and once-fertile ground for Islamists — have largely turned against the front. As a result, student unions have been closed on several campuses, student elections have been canceled and fierce clashes between the front's student supporters and opponents have ensued.

Economically, the Government is also struggling. This February it administered capitalistic shock therapy, devaluing the Sudanese pound, lifting all price controls and ending state subsidies.

For the moment, however, the Sudan remains desperate. Its support of Iraq in the gulf war led Saudi Arabia and other gulf states to sever aid and send back Sudanese workers, whose remittances were a key source of revenue. Official inflation stands at 100 percent. Imports are four times exports,

and the Sudan's annual expenditure on the civil war, between \$120 million and \$150 million, equals half of its export earnings.

Washington and Egypt, its neighbor to the north, are alarmed by what they claim is evidence of the Sudan's growing ties to Iran and support for terrorist groups, charges that Turabi dismisses as "rubbish." Even Western diplomats, including some Americans, are skeptical of reports of a strong Iranian presence in the Sudan, estimating the number of Iranians at no more than 200. "If you're looking for a vast Islamism," says one Government critic, "you won't find it here."

What worries some Arab analysts far more are the growing peaceful ties between Iran, a Shiite Muslim state, and Sunni Muslim Sudan — a development that reflects the closing of a historic rift between Shiite and Sunni Islamic forces — and Turabi's open attempt to fuse the formerly secular Arab nationalist movement with Islamic militancy.

"If the changes we've made here take hold, it'll amount to a veritable revolution," says Turabi, an energetic 60, and among the most articulate and influential theoreticians of the new Islamic militancy. "In Cairo and in Riyadh," he continues in fluent English, "the traditional religious establishments are trembling. The Saudis, with their monarchy and secular elites, have been propagating for years a very conservative Islam throughout the Middle East. But the gulf war has shattered that dynasty's legitimacy. Now, even they face a full-fledged Islamic movement that will no longer be bought off."

Turabi asserts that he has no official role in the Sudanese Government, but takes responsibility for the growing internationalism of the Islamic movement. He points proudly to an Islamic conference sponsored by Khartoum in April 1991, which featured not only prominent Shiite leaders but also mainstream leftist Arab nationalist figures, like George Habash, the Christian head of the radical Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, from determinedly secular Syria.

"Arab nationalists know they must come home, since

they have no future with the masses," Turabi says with quiet confidence. "Islam is becoming temporal. You in the West had better get used to it, and you should not be afraid of it. We are not your enemy. Besides, objectively, the future is ours."

THE BAD NEWS," muses a senior Egyptian official in his ornate Louis Farouk-style office, "is that a militant Islamic group has come to power in the Arab world. The good news is that it has come to power in the Sudan. We can contain the Sudan. And we will."

Not all Egyptians are as sanguine. Cairo, which shares the Nile with Khartoum, has long eyed its southern neighbor with a mixture of paternalism and suspicion. Turabi's regime, particularly its potential threat to Egypt's strategic Aswan Dam, a mere 150 miles from the Sudanese border, unsettles many officials.

Egypt has struggled against militant Islam since the late 1920's, when the grandfather of modern political Islamic movements, the Muslim Brotherhood, was born in the desperate poverty of Egypt's northern villages. Gamal Abdel Nasser, Egypt's still-beloved Arab nationalist leader, used the Islamic militants to help topple King Farouk, and then mercilessly suppressed them. Anwar Sadat, who initially courted and then arrested them along with other Government critics, was assassinated by them.

Hosni Mubarak, Egypt's current president, has attempted to contain Islamic militancy through a nuanced, multi-tiered policy of repression, co-optation and gradual liberalization. Rather than repress all Islamic groups, the Government has focused on those that espouse terrorism and violent subversion. Egyptian suppression of such groups — which were implicated recently in a massacre of Coptic Christians — has been fierce and unrelenting, prompting numerous protests about torture from Washington and human rights groups.

While Egypt has gradually permitted greater freedom of expression and political association, Mubarak will not allow the Muslim Brothers to



Hassan al-Turabi, chief of the National Islamic Front in the Sudan, helped write the country's Islamic laws, which include the death penalty for apostasy.

establish itself either as a political party or even as a formal cultural association. In fact, Mubarak repeatedly urged his friend, Chadli Benjiddi, not to permit Algeria's F.L.S. to operate as a political party, a senior official acknowledged.

"It's very frustrating," admits Maamoun el-Hodaiby, the head of the Brotherhood in Cairo, who wore a frayed Western suit, a scruffy gray beard and a warm smile. "What kind of a democracy is this when a political party can't operate without Government license?"

In an Islamic state, he said, many things as Egyptian as the Nile would be banned: belly dancing, for instance, and alcohol, a mainstay of Egypt's critical tourist industry, one of its largest sources of hard currency. Sharia would be the law, but women, a bulwark of the Egyptian economy, would still be permitted to work. "They could not, of course, be prostitutes," he says. "Or judges, or president. That's forbidden by the Koran."

In foreign policy, there would probably be no place for peace treaties with Israel, a view shared by Turabi and by most Islamists. "They're killing our people," Hodaiby says of the Israelis. But domestically, he stresses, Egypt would be more open than it is now. "All parties would be permitted — even atheists."

Though denied official political status, the Brotherhood is allowed to secure seats in Egypt's Parliament by forming coalitions with recognized political parties. Muslim Brothers are also permitted to head professional associations and other posts once reserved for the ruling National Democratic Party. In addition, the Brotherhood and its sympathizers offer health, social and charitable services to supplement those of the overwhelmed Government.

Saad Eddin Ibrahim, the political scientist, argues that the Government tolerates the Brotherhood's activities to put more radical groups at a disadvantage. "The Muslim Brothers is becoming a fairly respectable movement, like Christian Democrats or Euro-Communists," he says. "They're learning how to win and lose gracefully."

"If this is a paradigm," Ibrahim adds, "the evolution of the mother of all Islamic movements is encouraging."

Few expect the Brotherhood to pose a serious challenge to the Mubarak Government any time soon. It still only rarely wins union or association elections, and then only when the turnout is well below 50 percent.

Moreover, confidence in Egypt's future has recovered somewhat since the Gulf war. Many Egyptians grabbed thousands of lucra-

tive jobs that opened up in the Gulf states after the expulsion of the Palestinians, Sudanese and other Saddam supporters. At home, hopes were raised by the Government's cautious but steady assault on its socialist economic structures and a decline in the birth rate.

Egypt's radical Islamists were also hurt by the spectacular collapse of the country's largest Islamic investment funds, because of corruption and mismanagement. Thousands of poor religious Egyptians lost their life savings, and several other Islamic credit organizations are still reeling.

Finally, there is considerable freedom of expression in Egypt. Opposition newspapers and publications abound, and they are not afraid to criticize the president, still a rarity in most Arab countries.

The Government also seems to be defusing fundamentalism through "manipulated Islam," drowning people in Islamic jargon and stealing the militants' themes and slogans. The effects of such policies were particularly pronounced this spring during Ramadan. Bars in Cairo, which have already decreased from more than a hundred to only a handful, were closed. Each day, Muttal Sherawi, the superstar of television sheikhs, railed on the air against infidels and un-Islamic ways.

"But stealing the militants' slogans is slippery politics," warns Professor Ibrahim. "Trying to outdo the Islamists in education and the media creates an Islamic framework that puts secular forces on the defensive. We're turning the average mind and discourse toward Islam," he says. "There are about 40,000 mosques in Egypt, and the Government controls only 20,000 of them."

THE RISE OF militant Islam has triggered a fierce debate about what, if anything, the West can or should do about it. Some American officials and commentators have already designated militant Islam as the West's new enemy, to be "contained" much the way Communism was during the cold war. It would be a tragic mistake, they say, to look the other way while parties that are avowedly anti-Western, particularly anti-Israeli, anti-women and anti-democratic sweep to power in a strategically vital region.

Others warn that opposing the growing Islamic revival would be a catastrophic political error that would only reinforce anti-Western impulses. John Esposito, a scholar of resurgent Islam, argues that the West may be exaggerating the danger of militant Islam in order to fill the "threat gap" left by the Soviet collapse. He and others urge policy makers to distinguish between Islam as a religion — which may not be incompatible with democracy, and which traditionally has been relatively tolerant toward Jews, Christians and other minorities — and militant, politicized Islam.

But the opponents of politicized Islam insist that this distinction is meaningless, because Islam does not acknowledge a separation of church and state. The fact that Egypt and other "moderate" states have managed to keep Islam in check, they maintain, says little about Islam and much about the resolve of those Governments.

The opponents also maintain that Islam is becoming just another racket — a trendy new way of stirring the masses now that two imported ideologies — secular socialism and liberal democracy — are widely deemed a failure. "Twenty

years ago," says A. Abu Zayd, the head of Ombudrman Aliya University in Khartoum, "the military men who took over exposed pan-Arab socialism. Today it's Islam."

"To attract the young, Islam must be fierce and militant," he continues. "It must be opposed to the existing order. So to speak of a moderate political Islam is a contradiction in terms."

If the West decides to oppose political Islam, it is far from clear what it could do. "Indigenous support has been key to the Islamists' success almost everywhere," says Ali E. Hillal Dessouki, an Egyptian political scientist. "This means that the phenomenon will be hard to contain, since no single approach will work everywhere. But it also means there is unlikely to be a domino effect."

Some analysts counsel "democracy" and free political expression as an antidote to Islamic radicalism. But Dessouki is skeptical. Most Arabs, he says, think that democracy means "majority rule," without regard to minority rights. Democracy, he says, "is not just a procedure; it is a set of norms — tolerance, respect for individual rights, pluralism. This is years away."

That is why some analysts see the very gradual liberalizations under way in Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Morocco, strong states whose rulers have considerable legitimacy, as the most effective means of resisting Islamic fervor.

But others see little prospect of preventing a series of authoritarian Islamic takeovers, or at least continued cultural Islamization of the region. If nothing else, the Middle East's soaring birth rates will insure years of high unemployment and instability.

"In the long run, people will understand that Islam is not the solution," says Mohammed Sid Ahmed, a longtime fighter for secular ideals. "The Islamists will fail, just as the Iranian revolution has failed." While he despairs at the thought of wasting another 40 years on a dead-end Islamic experiment, he, like many Arab intellectuals, seems reconciled to political defeat. "If there is no other alternative, no way to change governments here peacefully, the Islamists may have to have their moment." ■



Abassi Madani, political chief of the Islamic Salvation Front, addresses followers in Algiers. Dislike in the group claim he is using Islam as a means to obtain power.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ABBAS/MAGNUM